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MR. DUTT AND LAND ASSESSMENTS.

(A REPLY TO MR. R. C. DUTT'S BOOK ON
FAMINES IN INDIA.)

BY

AN INDIAN CIVILIAN.

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I.

MR. R. C. DUTT is a gentleman of great ability and of extensive and varied experience in administrative and other affairs. He is well versed in the knowledge of both the East and the West. His book on *Civilisation in Ancient India* is, in its way, a monument of untiring industry, patient research and discriminating analysis. Any opinions, therefore, expressed by Mr. Dutt are entitled to respectful consideration. This gentleman has recently published in England a book called "Famines in India," which is an expansion of some open letters addressed by the author to Lord Curzon on the same subject. The thesis of Mr. Dutt's book is that, though the immediate cause of famines in almost every instance is the failure of rains, "the intensity and the frequency of recent famines are greatly due to the resourceless condition and the chronic poverty of the cultivators, caused by the over-assessment of the soil, on which they depend for their living." Mr. Dutt has seen so much of official life, he has been so much behind the scenes, that he cannot but give full credit to the Government of India for its good intentions, and for the material benefits conferred on the country. He admits that "if lands have been over-assessed in some provinces of India, if the revenue demand has been raised too suddenly and too high, if the population of the country has thereby been rendered resourceless and incapable of helping themselves to any extent in years



of drought—no class of men will be more anxious to remedy the evils than British administrators, who have devoted themselves to the great task of improving the material condition of the people of India.” It is in the hope of rendering some help in the great work which they have undertaken, that Mr. Dutt has published his book on “Famines in India.”

We have made a very careful study of this work. We have submitted it to a number of tests, in a spirit which, we hope, is far from hypercritical. We have approached the questions raised by the author with an entirely open mind, and have been compelled to arrive at the conclusion that Mr. Dutt's diagnosis of the malady from which the Indian agriculturist is suffering is inaccurate. We have examined the facts set forth in the book, and have been surprised to find that even these have been incorrectly stated. We are prepared to admit that the Indian agriculturist is poor, but we wholly disagree with Mr. Dutt as to the causes that have reduced the peasant to his present condition. We are of opinion that there is a remedy for the evil, which we all recognise, and we believe that Government will be able to grapple with it, if the matter is taken earnestly in hand. Lord Curzon is a highly gifted Viceroy. No ruler, perhaps, has been sent out to this country who has been endowed with such abounding energy, with such high talents and with such a capacity for sympathising with the people of India in their joys and in their sorrows, as the statesman who now governs India. It is not impossible that Lord Curzon's administration is considering, at present, the various matters dealt with in Mr. Dutt's book. It is because wrong issues have been raised in that work, and there is a danger of the true issues and facts being obscured and overlooked, that we have entered the field of the discussion. We propose to examine the whole subject in an



exhaustive manner, in a series of articles, of which this is the first. We shall endeavour to submit a popular exposition of the whole matter, avoiding technicalities as far as possible, but we promise to maintain a strict regard for truth and accuracy. Finally, while we do not propose to speak with any unbecoming acrimony of Mr. Dutt's facts and arguments, we reserve to ourselves the right of free and unfettered criticism.

We shall frequently have occasion to refer to the several classes of the community whose sustenance is derived directly from the soil. It will be convenient to mention them here and to give a short explanation about one class. The classes are four :—(1) Landlords, (2) tenure-holders, (3) cultivating peasants, and (4) landless labourers working on the soil. With regard to the first and the last two classes, no special explanation appears to be necessary at present. A word or two may be said about the second class. A tenure-holder is a person who holds an interest in land subordinate to that of the landlord, but superior to that of the cultivator. Between the peasant and the landlord there may be several grades of tenure-holders. Their rights are derived from various sources. A tenure-holder does nothing for the land, but receives rent from another tenure-holder below him or from a cultivator, retains a portion of it and passes on the balance to the landlord or superior tenure-holder above him. The class of landless agricultural labourers is found in all parts of India. With regard to the other three classes mentioned above, it is sufficient to say that the different grades of agriculturists are not so clearly defined in some provinces, as the classification would lead us to expect. For instance, in the Madras Presidency, there is often no middleman of any sort between Government and the peasant who has defined proprietary rights.

When a famine breaks out in any part of India, it is almost always due, at least in the first instance, as Mr. Dutt admits, to an entire or partial failure or early cessation of the rains. The effects of the drought are two-fold. In the first place the fruits of the peasant's past industry are destroyed wholly or partially, and then there is a serious interruption of the agricultural industry. The second result of a drought is most disastrous. Let us consider for a moment what the effects would be of a continued interruption of any industry. If the Babus in the lower grades of a Government office or the mill hands of a factory were dismissed from their employment and if they could get no other work, say for six months, how long would these men manage to live without incurring debt, if anybody could be found to lend them money, or without an appeal to charity? Again, it would scarcely be possible for the bulk of the agricultural labourers in England to live on their savings for more than a month or two, if they were suddenly turned adrift. In the great cotton famine of the early sixties, when a large number of mills were closed in Lancashire and factory hands were thrown out of employ, thousands of men, women and children had to live on public charity or to seek relief at the workhouse. It was not so very long ago that a numerous body of colliers in Wales went out on strike, and although they were supported for a time from the large sums accumulated by their Trades' Unions, within a few months they were compelled to seek the relief of the rates, as a recent case in the law courts in England has reminded us. If then, owing to a prolonged interruption or temporary destruction of a particular industry, the men engaged in it must sooner or later betake themselves—in India, England or elsewhere—to public relief or charity, how much more pressing must be the reason for the operation of such relief or charity when the industry



of the majority of the people of a district is destroyed or interrupted ?

In the Indian mofussil, agriculture is almost the sole industry of the working population. On the failure of the rains the occupation of most of them is gone. The class of the community that is immediately affected is that of the agricultural labourers. The standing crops are wholly or partially destroyed, and there is no harvest to reap. Then, it is not possible to work again on the soil for months. The ground becomes too hard for ploughing or sowing. The agricultural labourer has no work to do. If the calamity is confined to a district there is no overwhelming distress. The labourers of the district will find work, though with some difficulty, in the neighbouring districts. When, however, a province is afflicted or several provinces, the body of the agricultural labourers cannot be absorbed elsewhere. They have the wage-earning capacity, but there is no employment for them and no wages. They must starve or go to the relief works. The peasants, the men who have holdings of land, the men whom we have placed in the third class of the agricultural community, are not affected at first by the calamity in the same degree as the labourers. They have ordinarily a stock, however scanty, of food, and they have credit with the Bunniah. It is later, when the calamity is protracted and things instead of improving become worse that these men are compelled to go to the relief works. Whether the district or province affected be permanently settled or not, the conditions and the sequence of events are the same. Mr. Dutt seems to suggest that in permanently settled districts the distress in times of famine is less than elsewhere. We would invite his attention to the great Behar famine of 1873. It taxed all the energies and all the resources of Government to control it. Behar is a permanently settled



province, but critics were found even in 1873, who attacked the policy of Government. In 1885 a few districts of Bengal, including Burdwan and Birbhum, were afflicted with famine. This was easily managed by Government. A large number of the agricultural population of the districts sought employment in the neighbouring districts. Even then, relief works had to be opened and public charity appealed to. In the calamity of 1896-97 not one district, but many districts, not one province, but many provinces, were involved. The same disaster has overtaken many provinces in the present year (1900). The agricultural labourers were bound to go in either year to the relief works, as their occupation was gone, and there was no work for them elsewhere. But in both years, after some hesitation, the peasants have followed. We must bear in mind that these men are not capitalist farmers like those at home. Their holdings are small, their incomes limited. But in addition, in the Central Provinces, they have been overwhelmed and crushed by a cycle of bad years.

In these provinces, the series of lean years began in 1894. In five out of eighteen districts, the average harvest of the three years, preceding 1896-97, was poor, in three districts it was bad. In no district had a full crop been reaped; in one or two districts only a normal crop. Sir Charles Elliot, writing, in 1865, as Settlement Officer, about the Hoshungabad district, tells us that, according to a prevailing proverb, "the country being under the protection of Mahadeo may suffer from floods or too much rain, but never from drought." Unfortunately, the proverb has not saved the district from a prolonged agony of suffering. In the three years, preceding 1896-97, the average outturn of the district was 59 per cent. of a full crop. In the two worst years out of the three, the average outturn was 49 per cent.; in 1896-97, the autumn crop



was only 31 to 37 per cent. of the normal. Bad as things were in this district for years, other districts of the Central Provinces were worse off. The current year has seen the climax of the calamities which have been afflicting the people of the country for a long time. The drought has been more prolonged, the destruction of crops more general. The total amount of the loss in 1899-1900, owing to the destruction of crops in the several provinces of India, is estimated at between 40 and 50 millions of pounds sterling. It is, therefore, to the visitations of Providence and not to the policy of man, that we must look for the causes of the sufferings of the people. If our facts have been correctly stated, natural causes, which have destroyed the sole industry of millions of people, are responsible for the calamities which have visited India. Human agency can mitigate them, but can scarcely add much to them. Over-assessments of land revenue, even if there were any, would inflict in the circumstances stated some little additional hardship on the agriculturists, but could not account for their present sufferings except in the smallest possible measure.

II.

FOR the purpose of proving his proposition, that the intensity and the frequency of recent famines are due to over-assessments of land revenue, Mr. Dutt has summarily reviewed in his book the several famines that have taken place since the year 1770 up to date, and has arrived at the conclusion that, "if we examine somewhat closely the death-rates of the famines, which have occurred within this generation, *i.e.*, within the last twenty-five or thirty years, we shall find that deaths have generally been more numerous and famines have been most intense and fatal in those places where the cultivators are the least protected against over-assessments." Mr. Dutt's fulminations are directed against the land policy followed in the Central Provinces and in the Bombay and Madras Presidencies, *i.e.*, in the three provinces of India, in which the rule has definitely been laid down, that the payments of rent or land revenue made by the cultivating classes shall be assessed and fixed by the officers of Government.

With regard to the Central Provinces we may say at the outset that in Mr. Dutt's review the year 1897 is shown to be the first year, in the period of 130 years covered by his examination, in which these provinces were afflicted by famine. So that his argument with regard to the frequency of famines is not borne out by the facts relating to these provinces. In Northern India—which Mr. Dutt appears to have taken under his special protection—there have been almost as many famines as in the Madras Presidency within the last 130 years, whereas the Bombay Presidency has been much more fortunate than either of these provinces. With regard to the rates of mortality we are prepared to admit that, in the year 1897, these were higher in the Central Provinces and



in the Bombay Presidency than elsewhere. But Mr. Dutt has overlooked the explanations given for the high death-rates of the two provinces. For instance, the Famine Commissioners of 1898, while censuring the local authorities for their failure to grasp the situation in the latter part of 1895 and in the beginning of 1896, fully recognised the special conditions of the Central Provinces and the difficulties experienced by Government establishments in administering relief in a poor, backward and thinly populated part of the country. It was shown that the action of the State could not prevent the Gond and the Baiga from roaming the forests and living on their produce, until an exclusive course of such diet reduced them to a condition in which no assistance could save them from death. Mr. Dutt summarily disposes of the Commissioners' finding, but gives no adequate consideration to the facts set forth in their report. The truth is that Mr. Dutt has started with the theory that the Central Provinces are heavily assessed in the matter of land revenue, and without a particle of evidence has linked the theory, in a chain of cause and effect, with the admitted facts of the heavy mortality of 1897. Nowhere in his book has he mentioned the present and actual incidence of land revenue in the Central Provinces.

In a later article, we shall examine in detail the assessments of these provinces. It is sufficient here to point out that, while Mr. Dutt talks about the enhancements of rent and revenue, he does not inform his readers what the financial result of these enhancements is, nor does he compare the actual assessments of the Central Provinces with those of other provinces. Surely it is to be expected from a writer, who brings against Government the charge of exacting from the peasants of a province more than they can afford to pay, that he should show what

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they can and do produce, and how much of this produce is taken from them. To start with a theory, to give no evidence in support of it, and to endeavour to prove it from facts and conditions which are wholly alien to it, is a method of argument as illogical as it is barren of results. Before drawing from the history of two provinces the inference that the comparative immunity of one from the ravages of famine is due to light assessments of revenue and rent, and that heavy assessments are responsible for the terrible sufferings of the other, it should be shown that the meteorological and other essential conditions, prevailing in the two provinces over a given number of years (not necessarily the same period), had been at least approximately identical. If this proof were forthcoming, a strong case would be made out, but the inference even then would not be conclusive without further positive evidence that the peasants of the first province retained a much larger share of the produce of their holdings than the peasants of the other province. To show how futile the method of reasoning adopted by Mr. Dutt is, we proceed to invite the attention of our readers to some facts relating to the Madras famine of 1897 and to the terrible tale of the great famine of Mewar in 1717. In 1897, six districts of Madras were afflicted by famine. The actual death-rates per thousand in that year and the quinquennial averages for the several districts are shown in the following table :—

District.		Actuals.	Quinquennial
		1897.	average.
Kurnool	...	28·8	28·0
Bellary	...	31·2	25·5
Cuddapah	...	25·9	22·3
Anantpur	...	26·9	21·7
Ganjam	...	50·1	18·1
Vizagapatam	...	31·6	17·5



It will be seen that the death-rates in 1897 were abnormally high in the last two districts, whereas the increased mortality in the other districts was not greater than was to be expected in a famine year. Now in the four districts mentioned first the *ryotwari* system, which Mr. Dutt criticises, is in force. The other two districts are in the permanently settled tract of Madras. The great Vizianagram Zemindari is in the Vizagapatam district, and a large portion of the Ganjam district also is permanently settled. Shall we, then, following the line of argument adopted by Mr. Dutt, say that, according to recent statistics, those parts of Madras, where the permanent settlement system is in force wholly or partially, are more severely afflicted, because of the system, in years of famine than *ryotwari* tracts? Of course, neither Mr. Dutt nor anybody else would accept the conclusion without additional corroborative evidence. Again, here is a terrible tale relating to the Mewar famine of 1717, extracted from an old chronicle quoted in Tod's *Rajasthan*. "Though *Asar* was over, not a drop of rain fell from the heavens: and in like manner the months of *Sawoon* and *Bhadoon* passed away . . . People went mad with hunger. Things unknown were eaten. The husband abandoned the wife, the wife the husband—parents sold their children. . . . Fruits, flowers, every vegetable thing, even trees were stripped of their bark to appease the cravings of hunger: nay, *man ate man*." These scenes of horror, the occurrence of which it is impossible to conceive under the British Government, were enacted in the reign of a noble and philanthropical prince, of whom and of whose deeds Mewar is justly proud even now. We would commend the above extracts to the careful consideration of Mr. Dutt and other critics of his school. We have shown that the method of reasoning adopted by Mr. Dutt cannot lead us to any safe



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conclusion. So far, however, we have not given direct evidence that no part of India is over-assessed for land revenue. In our next article we propose to deal with this question.



III.

In examining the question as to the mildness or rigour of our present land revenue assessments, we may consider it from three points of view. In the first place, we may compare the demands of our Government with those of previous Governments. We may, then, review the actual incidence of revenue in the several provinces of British India and in some Native States for which information is available. Finally, we may scrutinise the assessments of those provinces in which the burden of land revenue is reported to be heavy and see how far the actual facts correspond with the allegations made about them. We shall examine the question under discussion from all these points of view. Let us first see how the land revenue demands of our Government compare with those of previous Governments. For a full and clear understanding of the evidence that we shall place before our readers, a few words of preliminary explanation are here necessary. The fact is well established that, from the earliest times of which we have any record, a tax has been levied in India on all cultivated land. Originally it was a share of the gross produce, and was gathered on behalf of the king on the threshing floor of each holding. This right to a "grain-share" was asserted and maintained by successive Governments and has been affirmed by our Government. Whatever name we may give to the payments made into the Treasury by proprietors and holders of land—tax, revenue or rent—the authority for levying these is based on the declaration of the British Government, repeated in various Regulations and Acts, that "it is entitled to a share in the produce of every bigha of land" (*e.g.*, see Regulation XIX of 1793).

The share of the early Hindu kings was one-sixth of the gross produce. It is true that we find in Manu a verse to the effect that the king shall take an eighth or a sixth or a twelfth of the crops. But there is no evidence to show that this was more than a pious declaration on the part of an ancient sage, that it had the force of law or was invested with the sanctity of custom. At all events, we learn from two authorities, Strabo and Diodorus Siculus, that even in Alexander's time the king's share of the grain was one-fourth. In course of time, the king—Hindu or Mohamedan—claimed and exacted an ever-increasing share until we find Ala-ud-din Khilji levying a half-produce tax. If the old traditional share of one-sixth was adhered to in any Hindu or Mohamedan kingdom, it was supplemented by numerous cesses, among which the most rigorous and the most oppressive was the poll tax. It was left to the great Mogul Emperor Akbar to mitigate the severity of the impositions and to place on a sound and stable footing the system of land administration. We need not enter into an elaborate examination of his regulations. It is sufficient to give a brief outline of his system. In the first place, Akbar fixed the land tax at one-third of the gross produce. He had the lands of the country roughly surveyed, and then made a classification of soils according to the number of years during which land of each kind was required to be kept fallow. Finally, he ascertained the average produce of a bigha of each kind, and laid down the rule that one-third of this average should be the share of his Government. He thus took more than one-third from the worst lands and less than one-third from the best lands. At first, the tax was collected in kind, but this method was necessarily unsatisfactory, and was a source of much peculation on the part of the tax collectors and of fraud on the part of the cultivators. Grain-shares were,



therefore, commuted into cash payments, and the calculations for this purpose were based on an average of nineteen years' prices. Subsequently, decennial settlements were made and the amount of each was fixed according to the average collections of the previous ten years. Although Akbar's regulations were frequently referred to and cited as authority in later years, with his death came practically the end of his policy. His immediate successors were certainly not very oppressive, but there came a time when the Mohamedan kings of Delhi and the several Governments, that were established on the disruption of the Mogul Empire, began to squeeze as much as they could from the peasants, either directly or indirectly through the zemindars, talukdars and others to whom the proprietary rights over the land of the country were gradually transferred. In the ever-memorable words of John Stuart Mill, the exactions of these Governments, except during the occasional accident of a humane and vigorous local administration, had no practical limit but the inability of the peasant to pay more. The Sikhs took often as much as one-half of the gross produce besides a number of cesses. The Mahrattas took a great deal more. Even in Mewar, where the peasants were dealt with more liberally than in many other parts of India, the Raja's share was one-third to two-fifths (*panchdo* in the vernacular) of the spring harvest and about one-half of the *kharif* or autumn crop.

We have no space here to enter into further details about the ever-growing demands of the Governments of the 17th and 18th centuries; nor would it be fair to take credit for the light assessments of the present day by comparing them with the exactions of ephemeral Governments, which, in the short space of time allowed to them, made as much profit as they could, regardless of the welfare of their subjects. But a comparison with

Akbar's assessments is permissible. His regulations indicate the high-water mark of efficiency ever reached by Native Governments in land revenue administration. He was the most generous as he was the wisest of Mohamedan kings. Generations of cultivators up to the end of the 18th century appealed to his land policy as their "ayeen" or law. We have seen that Akbar taxed land to the extent of 33 per cent. of its gross produce. The assessments of the British Government never approached this percentage. The text-books inform us that the Famine Commissioners of 1878 estimated the land revenue demand at three to eight per cent. of the gross produce. Sir William Hunter assessed the average of it at $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. Taking the facts of to-day, the average demand, as Mr. Dutt admits, is in Bengal five to six per cent., in the North-West Provinces and Oudh eight per cent., and in the Punjab ten per cent. of the gross produce. In the Central Provinces, the average demand per acre of the area actually under crop in 1898-99 was nine annas four pie, and in a valuable note recently published by the Hon. Mr. Bose it is shown that the net profit (excluding rent) of a peasant in that province is Rs. 10 per acre. The revenue demand, therefore, is barely six per cent. of the net produce and certainly not five per cent. of the gross produce. This is the province which, according to Mr. Dutt, is so much over assessed ! In the Bombay Presidency Proper (excluding Sind) the average land revenue demand per acre of cultivated area in *ryotwari* tracts was Rs. 1-6 in 1898-99. Taking *ryotwari* and zemindary lands together, it was Rs. 1-13-3 per cultivated acre and not Rs. 3-13-5, as stated by Mr. Dutt with unpardonable inaccuracy. If the average value of the gross produce may be estimated at Rs. 15 per acre—a very low estimate indeed—the demand on *ryotwari* lands in the Bombay Presidency is less than ten per cent.



of the gross produce, and that on all lands taken together is about 12 per cent. In Madras, the revenue demand on the dry lands in the districts referred to by Mr. Dutt was, at the time of the settlements, 16 per cent. on an average, or about one-sixth of the gross produce—an ideal demand according to old Hindu tradition. It was somewhat higher on wet lands, but the demand on these lands included a rate for irrigation—the price of a service specially rendered by Government—which in Northern India is separately assessed and is not included in the land revenue demand, a fact of which Mr. Dutt appears to be wholly ignorant. The original demands, therefore, at the time of the settlements, were not high. In course of time, the incidence of revenue became much lighter owing to a rise in prices. For instance, in South Arcot the original percentage of assessments to value of gross produce of wet lands was reduced, owing to the rise, from 31 (a figure on which Mr. Dutt has rung numerous changes) to 16. Of this fact no mention has been made by Mr. Dutt, although the figures relating to it are given side by side with those of the original assessments in the table from which he has borrowed. Is it permissible to believe that the figures contained in one column have been re-produced and those in the next column omitted, because no case for over-assessments in Madras would have been made out, if the latter figures which show considerable reductions in the original percentages, had been given?

We have now examined the revenue assessments of the six provinces of India referred to in Mr. Dutt's book. We have shown that in five provinces the revenue demand is between five and ten per cent. of the value of the gross produce. We have shown that in Madras it was originally 16 per cent. on dry lands and, if it was higher on wet lands, the higher incidence was due to the inclusion in the

demand of a rate for a special service rendered by Government. We have also shown that the averages in Madras were considerably reduced within a few years owing to a rise in prices. The inference from these facts is irresistible that,—compared with Akbar's 33 per cent. share,—our present assessments are very light, that they are milder than the old Hindu traditional demand, and we may remind our readers that they are much more so than Joseph's demand on behalf of Pharaoh after the cycle of lean years had terminated in Egypt. In our next article we shall resume from another point of view the examination of the question before us.

IV.

It is necessary at this stage of our enquiry to examine the criticisms offered by Mr. Dutt on one or two matters contained in the evidence placed before our readers. In our last article we cited the opinion of the Famine Commissioners of 1878, who estimated the Government revenue in the several provinces of India at three to eight per cent. of the gross outturn. This opinion Mr. Dutt criticises thus : " The value of the gross produce is calculated at £5 per ton for food and £3 per acre for non-food crops. The fallacy in the calculation lies in the fact that it assumes an annual produce for India which India never produces in any single year. All the cultivated area does not bear crops every year. . . . No approximately correct value of food crops and of non-food crops can be estimated, because it is not known how much of the area under cultivation bears any produce in any year or in a series of years." These remarks afford a good illustration of Mr. Dutt's ignorance regarding the conditions and arrangements in force in parts of India other than Bengal. If the criticism had been confined to the circumstances of 1878, there would have been some force in it. At that time the methods of compiling agricultural statistics were somewhat rudimentary. The work had been in progress for only two or three years. But now there is no excuse for Mr. Dutt's sweeping statements. Bengal, it is true, is still backward in the matter. But in all other tracts which are not permanently settled, elaborate arrangements have been made for the compilation through Patwaris or village accountants of agricultural statistics, and these can be fully relied on. For further information on the subject

we would refer our readers to Mr. Crooke's admirable work "The North-Western Provinces of India," pages 302 and 303. It is sufficient here to say that the statistics, which are periodically reviewed by supervising officers, give from year to year information as to the area actually under crop in each village, then the area twice cropped, then again the kind of crop grown on each plot of land, and finally the outturn of the crop. On examining the recently published volume on "Agricultural Statistics," we find that in 1898-99 wheat had been grown in the district of Mainpuri on 169,753 acres, barley on 82,176 acres. Again we find that the average outturn of wheat in the district was 665lbs., of barley 745lbs. per acre. If these figures, giving, as they do down to units, information regarding the acreage of cropped area and the outturn per acre are not mythical, they show that we have fairly reliable statistics for ascertaining what area in a given province has been cultivated in a year, what crops have been grown and what is the average produce per acre. Finally, if we turn to the tables of prices, we shall work out the value of the gross produce of a district in a year.

Another criticism of Mr. Dutt, while it points a moral, does not adorn the tale of Mogul land administration. Two manuscripts in the British Museum give the land revenue of the Mogul Empire for 1664-65 at 26 crores 74 lakhs and 24 crores 5 lakhs respectively. Documents preserved in the India Office library put down the amount of Aurungzebe's land revenue in the beginning of the 18th century at about 34 crores of rupees. The amount of the land revenue collected by the British Government in 1898-99 was about 27 crores and in 1899-1900 about 25 crores. If we take into account certain facts, viz., that several provinces which are now under the British Government never acknowledged the authority of

the Mogul Emperors, that a large portion of the country now under cultivation had not been touched by the plough in those days, and finally that the purchasing power of a rupee was very much higher in the 17th and 18th centuries than it is now, the figures given above indicate the very oppressive character of the Mogul land policy. This has been pointed out by several writers. Mr. Dutt's criticism on the subject is characteristic : " It is forgotten that the old figures only represent an ideal demand which was never collected in full ; that it was the policy in previous ages to fix the demand at a high figure and to collect as much of it as was possible from year to year ; and that to compare modern figures with these old figures is to compare collections actually made by British administrators with collections which were never made by Mohamedan administrators." It is difficult to know whether to admire more the ingenuity of the remarks or the almost child-like simplicity of mind evinced in them. Does it not strike Mr. Dutt that nothing could be more oppressive, nothing more demoralising than a system, which removed from the peasant all incentive to labour, which confiscated the fruits of his industry when there was a surplus beyond a bare pittance and which bade him toil on his land at his peril, since the outstretched arm of the tax-collector was ever ready to take what it could seize ? We may admit that the actual collections of the Mogul Emperors did fall short of their demands, but they must have been approximately close to these ; otherwise, what was the sense in constantly raising what Mr. Dutt is pleased to call an ideal demand ? For instance, the land revenue demand for Bengal, Behar and Orissa was in 1728 about 142 lakhs of rupees. It was frequently raised after that year until in 1765 it stood at about 256 lakhs, an increase of 114 lakhs in 37 years. We may admit that the whole of 256 lakhs was never

collected, but, if we are asked to believe that the collections stood at the original demand or fell much short of the latest demand and that the Subehdar of Bengal, like the man in the Arabian Nights, fed his hopes on an ever-growing "ideal" demand, then our reply must be, for the sake of politeness, in the Latin tongue : *Credat Judæus Apella!* Whatever may have been the difference between the amounts of the demands of other Mohamedan Princes and their collections, we have positive evidence that Akbar's demands fixed at the decennial settlements represented his actual collections. Abul Fazl, one of his Ministers, distinctly states this fact in his well-known book.

Akbar's demand and his collections from Bengal and Northern India amounted to seven crores and 73 lakhs of rupees. The purchasing power of silver was in his days two to three times greater than it is now. His collections, therefore, amounted to more than 15 crores of our money. The collections of our Government in the abovementioned provinces amounted to about 12 crores in 1895-96. (We are using Mr. Dutt's figures.) If we remember that a very large portion of the country was not under cultivation in Akbar's time, it will be readily admitted that the collections of our Government are extremely moderate in comparison with those of the wisest and the most liberal of Mohamedan Princes. How moderate the demands of our Government are will also be seen from the table given below, and it will not be open to Mr. Dutt or any other critic to say that the *demands* of the Native States mentioned in it have been unfairly compared with the collections of the British Government. The table has been compiled from the last published volume on Agricultural Statistics, and the calculations have been based on the amounts of land revenue actually collected in 1898-99.

British Province or Native State.		Incidence of land revenue per acre of cultivated or <i>net cropped</i> area.			
		Rs.	As.	P.	
British Provinces.	Central Provinces	...	0	9	4
	Bengal	...	0	12	7
	Punjab	...	1	2	10
	Berar	...	1	2	10
	Assam	...	1	3	4
	Ajmere-Merwara	...	1	3	11
	Coorg	...	1	4	11
	Bombay— <i>ryotwari</i>	...	1	6	0
	Oudh	...	1	15	1
	Lower Burma	...	1	15	4
	N.-W. Provinces	...	2	0	2
	Upper Burma	...	2	2	1
Native States.	Madras— <i>ryotwari</i>	...	2	4	11
	Sind	...	2	6	0
	Bikanir	...	0	7	7
	Marwar	...	0	15	10
	Mysore	...	1	8	6
	Gwalior	...	2	5	9
	Tonk	...	2	9	6
	Jaipur	...	4	3	10

It will be seen that the incidence of land revenue is the lowest in the Central Provinces of all British provinces, including the permanently settled tract of Bengal. It will be noticed that Bombay, another of the so-called over-assessed provinces, compares favourably with other parts of India. It will be remembered that the Madras figures include irrigation charges on wet lands. Finally, it will be observed that in the above list the Native States of Jaipur and Tonk appear to be most heavily assessed, and that Gwalior is more heavily assessed than any British province except Sind. The reader may be left to draw his own conclusions. Further comment would be superfluous.



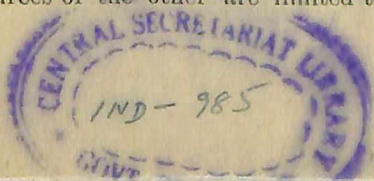
V.

IN accordance with the promise made in a previous article we now proceed to examine in some detail the rent and revenue assessments of the Central Provinces. In the latter half of the 18th century, the land revenue of this province was collected from the peasants through the agency of patels or village headmen, who were permitted to retain one-fourth of the collections. The office of these men was hereditary in those days. Later, whatever rights they had in the past were almost entirely swept away, and the Mahratta rulers of the country collected the land revenue either direct from the cultivators or through revenue farmers. Sometimes the patels were permitted to take short leases of villages or estates, often strangers were brought in. The lessees had a very small margin of profit, seldom more than one-tenth of the rental assets. When after the Mutiny the British power was fully established in the province, a regular settlement of villages and estates was made, and proprietary rights were conferred on the revenue farmers, who were called malguzars. One condition of the settlement was that a percentage—which now varies from fifty-four to sixty, although the maximum is fixed at sixty-five—of the gross rental assets should be paid to Government on account of revenue.

It will be admitted that a valuable asset has been created by the British Government in favour of men, who hardly had any rights, at least none which the previous Governments of the province had recognised. Forgetful of the gift so freely bestowed on them, these new landlords have been agitating for some time past regarding their so-called grievances, one of which is that they,



i.e., the malguzars are debarred from fixing the rents of the cultivators, and that these are periodically assessed by officers of Government. When the land policy of the Central Provinces was inaugurated, the prospect of handing over, without proper safe-guards, millions of peaceful peasants to the tender mercies of men, who after all were mere farmers of revenue and who had been brought up in a bad school of rack-renting and oppression, could not have been contemplated without considerable anxiety. Mr. Hume had written about that time that the more he saw of the landlords of the country the stronger was his conviction that they were not then fit to be entrusted with the power and license which has been given to them under our system. There was also the instructive example of Bengal, driven to despair by the exactions of the zemindars, whose powers of mischief had been curtailed but not entirely removed by Act X of 1859. Even now, in spite of the salutary checks imposed on them by Lord Dufferin's Rent Act, the landlords of Bengal do not always exercise their authority and powers with moderation and discretion. When the rents of non-occupancy ryots come to be fixed, as in the end they must be, by competition, the tendency is to level up the rents of occupancy ryots also. There can be no stronger plea put forward in a case for enhancement of rent than the one founded on the prevailing rate of the district or estate concerned: and this rate is often no other than the one applied at first to tenants-at-will and in course of time accepted under some pressure by occupancy ryots. The protection of our Civil Courts in enhancement suits is of the smallest except when there is a powerful combination of peasants to resist the demands of their landlord. When of two parties to a suit one has an almost inexhaustible purse, and the resources of the other are limited to a few rupees, a



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Civil Court with its long delays and its large "miscellaneous" expenses is oftentimes turned into an engine of oppression. For instance, some years ago the peasants of a large estate in Bengal refused to pay the illegal cesses imposed on them by a powerful combination of zemindars, whereupon the latter proceeded summarily to raise the rents by reducing the standard of measurement, which had been used on the estate for over a hundred years. When the ryots declined to accept the enhancements and tendered the rents actually due, these were rejected and some of the men were sued in the Courts for the very amounts which had been refused, so that they might be reduced to proper discipline by the expensive machinery of the law. The whole countryside was aflame with excitement at this oppression, and there would have been a recrudescence of the Pabna riots, had not a young Magistrate intervened and threatened the zemindars with dire pains and penalties. These things have happened in Bengal. If they are done in the green tree, what will not be done in the dry? When we are told that "the wisest, safest and most considerate policy is to let landlords make their own arrangements with cultivators as regards rent," let the facts we have just stated be borne in mind. Lest our readers forget we would recall to their memory the past achievements of the rack-renting aristocracy of Bulandshahr. We would also refer them to the last administration report of the Punjab in which they will find it stated that, on more than two-fifths of the unirrigated area cultivated by tenants and on more than one-third of the irrigated area, half the produce or more is given on account of rent. Finally, we would cite the authority of a distinguished District Officer, Mr. Crooke, in support of the proposition that in Upper India "sooner or later Government must nerve itself to fix the rent with the revenue at the periodical revisions of the settlements." The evidence that we



have collected proves conclusively the wisdom of the Government policy in the Central Provinces, *viz.*, that the rents of the peasants shall be assessed at the same time and by the same officers as the revenue payable by landlords.

It is the cue of the *malguzars* to discredit this policy, and they proceed to do this by making loud complaints that the rents are exorbitant and that the methods of assessment are faulty. In spite of Mr. Dutt's dithyrambics the evidence before us shows that the rent rates are low. The Hon. Mr. Bose in his able note on the re-settlements of the Central Provinces acknowledges that the assessments at the earlier settlements were moderate, and admits that "the incidence of rent and revenue in the Central Provinces is, as compared with the incidence in some of the other provinces, low." In the same note we find a passage extracted from a revenue report, which goes to show that some settlement officers are disposed to reduce even the *existing* rents, when these appear to be theoretically high, although they have been paid without difficulty and complaint. It is scarcely necessary to give further evidence on the subject in view of Mr. Bose's well-known opinions. However, we give some figures in support of our contention. According to the latest statistics, the incidence of rent per acre of assessed area in the Central Provinces is twelve annas two pies. In five districts out of 18, the average is a little over one rupee per acre, in four districts between one rupee and 12 annas, in six districts between 12 annas and eight annas, and in three districts it is below eight annas even. Now let us see what the incidence of rent is per acre of *cropped* area. We find that in 1898-99, out of every four acres assessed for revenue and rent, three acres were actually cultivated and bore crops. If the average incidence of rent for the whole province is, as we have stated, 12 annas 2 pies per acre of

assessed area, it must be about one rupee three pies per acre of cropped area. Compare this figure with the corresponding figures for the North-Western Provinces, Oudh and Bengal. The figure for the first named province was in 1898-99 Rs. 4-0-4, for Oudh Rs. 3-14-2, and for Bengal (according to calculations based on a very low estimate of Mr. Dutt) Rs. 2-12-11. Will anybody have the courage to say after looking at these figure that the rent assessments of the Central Provinces do not compare very favourably with those of the other provinces named above?

Let us examine the question from another point of view. If we take Rs. 12 as the value of the gross produce per acre—and it will be admitted that our estimate is very moderate considering the fact that Mr. Bose puts down Rs. 10 for net profit (excluding rent) per acre—the percentage of rent to value of gross produce in the Central Province is about nine. We may acknowledge that in some districts the percentage is higher, but the fact remains that for the province, as a whole, it is less than half of the rent recommended by Mr. Dutt as fair and equitable.

If our statements are correct, how is it that a gentleman of Mr. Dutt's acknowledged ability has fallen into such blunders, how is it that in the case of the Central Provinces he has condemned a policy which is so much more liberal than that recommended by him? The reply is that Mr. Dutt has scarcely made any original researches or investigation, that where he has looked up authorities at first hand his examination has been very perfunctory, and that he has accepted without challenge or question the gossip of the market place and of the Congress Hall. The account of the Bilaspur settlement, to which we shall next proceed, will make this quite clear.



VI.

WE now proceed to give a short account of the re-settlement of the Bilaspur District in the Central Provinces. We have selected this district for various reasons, one of which is that its last settlement proceedings have been the subject of a prolonged agitation, the echoes of which have come down to the present day. The first regular settlement of the district was carried out in 1868, when proprietary rights were conferred on village headmen and revenue farmers. The settlement made on this occasion of land revenue payable to Government and of rents payable by the peasants to the landlords was for 20 years. A new settlement was made about ten years ago and was confirmed by Government in 1894. It was worked out by an able native officer, Rai Bahadur Persotam Das, it was passed by another distinguished officer, Mr. Fuller, C.I.E., and it was sanctioned by the most humane of provincial Governors, Sir John Woodburn, who was then Chief Commissioner. The names of these officers, under whose initiative or auspices the measure was brought to completion, ought to be sufficient guarantee that the rent and revenue assessments at the last settlement could not have been harsh and exorbitant. But for reasons, which shall be given presently, these have been assailed in the strongest terms by the malguzars who have found in Mr. Dutt their latest and most eloquent champion.

It is true that this gentleman does not refer in his book to the Bilaspur District by name. As, however, he names no other and at the same time harps on 100 per cent. enhancements of land revenue, and since in no other district have the enhancements been so large, we

must take it that he had the Bilaspur District in his mind, if, indeed, he knew anything about any district. And yet before condemning the enhancements, if Mr. Dutt had given a few minutes' thought to the study of the tables which he has borrowed from Mr. Bose and reproduced in his book, he would have exercised some self-control, he would have investigated facts for himself, and he would have discovered much to admire and much to respect. In the tables printed by him we find for the district of Bilaspur that at the new settlement the percentages of enhancements of rent were, in two groups, 13·4 and 7 respectively. We find also that the percentages of enhancements of land revenue were 102 and 105 respectively. Now, if what was said in the last article be borne in mind, *viz.*, that the land revenue payable to Government in the Central Provinces is a certain percentage of the rents payable by peasants, it must occur to many that if the existing rents are raised to the extent of 13·4 and 7 per cent., the land revenue cannot possibly be enhanced 102 and 105 per cent., unless there are other factors involved in the matter. Mr. Dutt has not apparently given any consideration to this point. When, however, we turn to the settlement report, we find a clue—a clue, which, no doubt, many of our readers will obtain for themselves without our help. There are three Tehsils in the district of Bilaspur. Within the twenty years that passed between 1868 and the date of the new settlement cultivation had advanced in one Tehsil by 24 per cent., in another by 39 per cent., and in the third by 60 per cent. If large tracts of fresh land are brought into cultivation, the gross rental and the land revenue must increase largely, although there may be very small enhancements of the rent-rates. As a matter of fact, the extent of the land cultivated by the three classes of tenants in the Bilaspur District had been

enlarged within 20 years by 382,210 acres. The tenants' payments of rents to their landlords, which in 1868 stood at a little over three lakhs of rupees, had been increased by economic causes—including expansion of cultivation—to about six lakhs of rupees, and the landlords, while they paid to Government on account of revenue a percentage of the former amount, retained the whole of the increased profits. Things stood thus in 1888. When the settlement officer began to examine the rents paid in that year, the real facts were hidden from him at first, but from sources, which are always accessible to a native officer, seldom to a European, he succeeded in ascertaining the actual amounts paid by the tenants at the time of the new settlement. He has never been forgiven for the discoveries made by him, the truth of which was admitted by all but a few malguzars. For years past the landlords had been pocketing the extra profits derived not only from expanded cultivation but also from enhancements of rents, which they had made when old tenants gave up their holdings and new tenants took them up. All that Rai Persotam Das did was to bring into the coffers of Government its legitimate share of the extra profits, which the landlords had been enjoying for years without paying an additional penny to the State, and to raise slightly the rates of rent in the case of old tenants.

In 1868, the district of Bilaspur had been in a state of land-locked isolation. Since that date the railway had been opened, and prices had been doubled and in some cases trebled. In spite of this very large increase in prices, in 1890 the rent-rates were raised to a very small extent. The average rates per acre of the three classes of tenants at the old settlement had been Rs. 0-9-3, Rs. 0-9-4 and Rs. 0-8-4 respectively. At the new settlement the first two rates were raised to Rs. 0-9-10 and the last to Rs. 0-9-7. These are the enhancements—a few pies

per acre for two classes of tenants—about which Mr. Dutt waxes indignant! If readers will turn to the last article, they will see how liberal the new rates are. The revised assessments were accepted by the landlords and the peasants, and the land revenue and rents were collected without any difficulty. This fact is distinctly stated by all the three officers concerned. The Chief Commissioner, in reporting the settlement to the Government of India, writes thus :—“ The revised assessment has been borne by the malguzars with ease. It has now been in force for *three years*, and no *trouble or difficulty* has been experienced in collecting the enhanced demand.” (The italics are ours.) Will Mr. Dutt have the courage to contradict this statement of Sir John Woodburn?

If our author had given to the examination of the facts, brought together in this series of articles, the time he has spent in compiling a book for the benefit of the British public, he would have seen how far from the truth are his allegations about excessive revenue and rent assessments. Of course, we cannot say without an exhaustive examination that in no district are the assessments high, and we may add that those of the Northern Division of Bombay require an explanation. But we hope that we have proved conclusively that on the whole the revenue demands of the present day are very moderate in themselves, and that the land policy of our Government is much more generous and much more liberal than the policy of any previous Government of the country. In endeavouring to prove the contrary Mr. Dutt has shown himself a most unreliable guide. In our next article we propose to establish the proposition that, apart from his facts being wrong, the issue raised by him is false, and that in diverting attention from the true issues he has rendered a disservice to the country of his birth.

Before closing this part of the discussion, we venture to make a few suggestions, and we hope that they will attract the attention of the authorities :—

(a). Ordinarily, a settlement should not be for a period less than 15 years. The reasons for this suggestion will be found in Rudyard Kipling's charming story "Tods' Amendment," which shows how much deeper and truer in some matters is the insight of genius than the vision of the ablest officials, tethered to tradition and precedent.

(b). The period of a settlement should not ordinarily exceed 20 years. If a longer period intervenes and one generation dies out and another takes its place, the liability to enhancements is forgotten or overlooked, and in cases of increased demands of revenue or rent at the new settlement a grievance is manufactured, where there should be none. In matters of this sort Government should take cognizance of this human weakness and shape their policy accordingly.

(c). When a settlement is undertaken, it should be completed rapidly. The proceedings always create a state of unrest and anxiety. We find that all over the country they take an unconscionable time to complete. There is no sufficient excuse for protracting them over a number of years.

(d). In a famine year the remissions of Government revenue when it is taken from cultivators should be full. No peasant should start with a load of arrears after a famine. He requires a year or two to right himself, he has other demands to meet, and he should not be handicapped with the further demand of revenue. It is very much to the credit of Lord Curzon's Government that recently this principle has been fully recognised and given effect to liberally.

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VII.

THE prosperity or the poverty of a peasant depends on the amount of his net income after he has satisfied the demands made on him. Putting aside for the present the claims of those, who under various names—Bunniah, Mahajun, Soukar—finance the agricultural industry of the country, let us take into consideration the demands of those from whom the peasant derives his title to and possession of the holding cultivated by him. He may hold his land direct from Government, as in Bombay, Madras, and other *ryotwari* tracts, or there may be between him and Government one interest, *i.e.*, that of the landlord, as in the Central Provinces, or there may be, as in Bengal, several interests, *viz.*, of the landlord and of the several classes of tenure-holders or middlemen. It follows that in examining the question as to the poverty or the well-being of a peasant the point for consideration should be, not so much what share Government takes of the produce of the soil, as the total amount of the payments made by the actual cultivator and the net surplus left to him. These payments may be made direct to Government or may be divided between the several interests—including that of Government—superior to that of the peasant. The share of the State in the gross produce of land may be large in any province, but, if there are no other persons to intercept the fruits of the peasant's industry, he may be well off. On the other hand, the Government share may be small, but, if there are others—landlords and tenure-holders—who claim to participate in the produce of the land, the peasant, in spite of the moderation of the State demand, may be



very poor. For instance, a ryot in Madras, even if he paid,—which he does not—one-third the value of the gross produce of his holding to Government, would be in a more prosperous condition than a cultivator in the Punjab, holding the same area of equally productive land, since in that province, although the Government share is small, the peasant often pays as much as half the produce of his holding or even more to the landlord or tenure-holder above him.

The economical forces at work in the country, to which we shall refer presently with some amplitude of detail, are constantly creating new interests in the land and are planting on the soil men, who do nothing for it and who, as was pointed out the other day, reap where they have not sown and gather where they have not strawed. In the Punjab the proprietary bodies, that in former days both owned and cultivated the land, are transferring their rights to non-agriculturists, and there are many men now working as tenants on the holdings, which they or their fathers possessed in absolute right. Again, some members of the landlord class in the same province find it more profitable, without transferring their rights, to receive rents where once they used to toil and gather the fruits of their industry. In 1887-88, three-fifths of the land of the Punjab was cultivated by the proprietors themselves and the remaining two-fifths by tenants. Within a decade more than one-tenth of the land of the province had passed from the direct possession of landlords to that of tenants, and on this area there are now two classes sharing the produce with Government, where formerly there had been only one. In the North-Western Provinces and Oudh the same economical forces are at work and with almost the same result. In Bengal there are sometimes as many as seven interests between Government and the actual cultivator. In the northern districts of the Central Provinces a

new interest in land has already sprung up between the *malguzar* and the peasant, although elsewhere in the province the evil is not accentuated. Even in the *ryotwari* tracts of Bombay and Madras the old peasants have taken to subletting their lands.

The same economical forces, which are thus constantly planting new interests on the land and imposing fresh burdens from year to year, are also curtailing in other ways the means of the peasant for securing a sufficient livelihood for himself and his family. Year after year the average size of a peasant's holding is being reduced. Twenty years ago, the average area of a holding of a tenant-at-will in the Punjab was about six acres, in the North-Western Provinces about four acres, in Oudh and in Bengal about three acres, in the Central Provinces about 14 acres. The holdings of more privileged *ryots* were somewhat larger. Small as these holdings were 20 years ago, they are much smaller now. In the Central Provinces the average size of the holding of a tenant-at-will has been reduced from 14 acres to nine acres. In Madras the peasant proprietor owns on an average seven acres of land. If the average number of a peasant's family be taken as four, and if we put down Rs. 12 to Rs. 15 as the value of the net produce and Rs. 20 as the value of the gross produce per acre in the several provinces, we shall see how little a peasant has to support his family on, and how scanty the margin is between him and starvation in a year of scarcity. In Azamghar each member of a peasant's family has to live on the produce of about half an acre of land. The only part of India where the peasant ought to be really prosperous is Bombay, since the area of an average holding there is about 24 acres. Even in this province there are about half a million peasants whose holdings average less than five acres each.



The economic causes, which are responsible for this condition of things in India, are the constantly increasing growth of the population, the paucity of the industries in which the people of the country can find employment and the insatiable hunger for land in consequence. A hundred years ago there was competition for men to cultivate land, now it is for land so that men may live, although millions of acres have been cleared since. The struggle for cultivable land is so great that it is robbing the cattle of their grazing ground. About 70 per cent. of the people of the country derive their sustenance from agriculture, because they have no other industry to fall back upon. We may talk about the high assessments of land revenue, but in the present condition of things they cannot be the cause of the chronic poverty of the peasant. If the revenue demands of the Government were wholly remitted or largely reduced, the actual cultivators—the men who work and toil on the land—would not be benefited in the end. Government would have to find fresh sources of taxation, but the amount of the land revenue remitted would, in course of time, be intercepted by the landlords and the tenure-holders. In 1793, the total amount of the rental of Bengal stood at about three crores and 25 lakhs of rupees ; now, according to the road cess papers, it is about 16 crores and a half. According to the best evidence it is a great deal more. But accepting the figures supplied by the landlords themselves the rental has risen in 100 years by over 13 crores of rupees. The Government demand, as we all know, is limited. The zemindars and the middlemen have annexed all the benefits derived from expanded cultivation, from the rise of prices and from the keen competition for land. Up to 1859 the peasant had no benefit whatsoever from the moderation of the Government demand and, in spite of rigorous legislation since that date, he has not derived



much benefit from it. Within the last 25 years the rental of Bengal has been raised by three crores and 40 lakhs of rupees.

As long as the agricultural industry continues practically to be the sole industry of the country, as long as the struggle for the possession of land continues, so long in Bengal and elsewhere the forces at work will cause the surplus beyond the bare sustenance of the actual cultivator to be confiscated sooner or later and to be divided among the interests superior to his. We may give any name we like to this surplus—rent or revenue,—but it is really the price of a monopoly, the value of a thing possessed and held, and it must be paid so long as millions of persons are competing for it. Remit or abate the Government demand, impose on the landlords the most salutary checks : new interests will always spring up in the land. The occupancy-ryot of to-day will be the tenure-holder of to-morrow. He is a working man to-day, to-morrow he will be a drone, his only business in life being to pocket the difference between the privileged rent secured to him by law and a rack-rent extorted from a peasant hungering for land. The Famine Commissioners of 1878 recognised the evil of the practice of sub-letting, and recommended that it should be discouraged and even, if possible, forbidden. Having gone so far they ought to have gone a step further. They ought to have seen that if the practice, which they condemned, were prohibited, and if no other work or industry were provided for the men, who after all eke out a scanty living under the present system, they must die of starvation.

We have said enough to show that when Mr. Dutt talks about high assessments, he has failed to probe the causes of the evil which we all admit and all deplore. Inasmuch as he has diverted attention from the economical forces at work he has rendered a positive disservice to



the country. We do not, of course, recommend high assessments, and we do support low assessments. But the real remedy of the evil, with which the country is afflicted, must be found elsewhere. We shall return to this subject in our next article.



VIII.

IN our last article on the subject under discussion we pointed out that the agricultural industry was practically the sole industry of the country, and that millions of people had to derive their sustenance from it. We showed how in consequence of this fact there was an ever-growing struggle for land, how fresh interests were planted on it from year to year and fresh burdens were imposed, and how the means of the peasant for securing a livelihood for himself and his family were gradually being curtailed, so that in the end there was very little left to him beyond a bare pittance. We are of course referring to the general condition of things in India. There are parts of the country, for instance East Bengal, where the peasant is very prosperous, but even there the tendency to deterioration has recently been noticed. We have seen how precarious the agricultural industry is and how the uncertain rainfall of a season ruins a whole province and deprives millions of people of their ordinary occupation. It remains to draw attention to a principle, which political economists call the law of diminishing returns, and which is applicable in a special degree to agriculture. The soil after some years gets exhausted, and unless its productive powers are renewed by a period of rest and the recuperative action of Nature, it yields but a very scanty outturn. Again in a country like India the lands left uncultivated, and which may hereafter be brought under cultivation are mostly inferior and unproductive in many senses. Finally, it is a principle well-recognised all over the world that after the threshold of remunerative production is passed in the case of *any* land, fresh applications to it of capital and labour yield diminishing outturns. To put the matter



in popular language, the agricultural industry becomes more and more unprofitable every year. Apart from all other considerations, this should be a sufficient reason why the people of India should not be tied to this single industry and accounts to some extent for their poverty.

It has been argued with some show of reason that the poverty of the peasant is largely due to the exactions of money-lenders. If we go deep into the matter, we shall find that the extortions of these men are not a cause but a symptom of the evil which we are discussing. No industry in the world can be carried on with efficiency unless it is properly financed. The tea planter of Assam, the farmer of Great Britain, the merchant, the manufacturer, all require advances from their banks for facilitating the conduct of their business. The reason is that until the work in hand is completed and the remuneration for it obtained, the preliminary operations require more outlay than they bring in revenue, and it is within the competence of very few to command sufficient funds for the purpose during this period. The Indian peasant in his small way requires the services of a money-lender, who discharges a most useful function in the agricultural economy of the country. He not only assists production by his advances, but is often the sole agent within certain limits for the distribution of the produce of the land. He charges a high rate of interest, firstly, because the loanable capital in the mofussil is limited, secondly, because he trades on the want of intelligence of the peasant, and lastly, because the security for his loan is very small. It is because the cultivator is so poor, because the money-lender sees the risks that he runs in making advances to this man that he puts such an exorbitant price on the loans given by him. The ryot's poverty compels him to submit to the bunniah's terms, and these, once they have enveloped the peasant in the

meshes of debt, retain him in the bondage of the money-lender. Recently the question as to the establishment of agricultural banks has been widely discussed. Mr. Duper-nex, of the Indian Civil Service, has written a comprehensive work on the subject. We do not propose to go into the matter at present. It is sufficient to say here that the difficulties in the way of establishing agricultural banks are immense. Even if they were overcome, the disease, with which the country is afflicted, might be palliated, but could not be cured.

What then is the remedy for the evil? It may be stated in a very few words. Remove from the land some of the millions living on it and find other work for them. The people of India are industrious and frugal; all that they require is work. Some authorities call them indolent and improvident. We cannot admit this. They may not be capable of sustained exertion, but those who know them best and are most competent to judge them are of opinion that the people of the country on the whole are hardworking, when they have work to do, and thrifty, when they have enough to live on and to save. The coolie emigrants to the different parts of the world, South Africa, Uganda, Mauritius, the West Indies, &c., have always been admired for their industry and frugality. Within the last three years the emigrants to Mauritius alone have remitted to India about four lakhs of rupees.

If work is found for the people of the country of a sufficiently remunerative character, work that will inspire them with hope, confidence and courage, and impart to them a certain measure of intelligence, they will be found ready to do it, provided that their prejudices are respected and their idiosyncrasies humoured. Political economists tell us that the primary and universal requisites of production are labour, natural resources and capital. We have seen that there are vast quantities of wasted or



unused labour in the country, waiting for profitable employment. The natural resources of India are immense, and they still remain largely unexplored and undeveloped. India is not merely a country, it is a continent "with all shades of climate, soil and position." Practically there is no sort of industry, which cannot be carried on in one or other part of the country, none which under wise management will not be very remunerative in the end. India ought to be a very wealthy country, whereas it is a very poor one.

Surely, with overflowing labour and abundant natural resources it is not beyond the competence of statesmanship to solve the problem of the poverty of India. Much has been done in the past by British enterprise, much by the policy of Government, but it is little compared with the needs of the country. What India requires is capital, the third and often the most potent requisite of production. The anarchy and misrule of centuries and the recent operation of the economical forces, to which we have referred, have prevented the growth of capital in this country. Foreign capital must be introduced. This capital can come into the country in three ways. There may be a natural and spontaneous flow, or it may be enticed into the country by a guarantee against loss and by an assurance of small but certain profits, or it may be procured by Government loans. In the past much capital has come in spontaneously, but it has been wholly insufficient for the requirements of the country. The stability of exchange and other conditions may accelerate the current and increase its volume, but until British capitalists realise that investments are as safe in India as in England and equally or more profitable, much cannot be expected from this source, at least nothing commensurate with the real needs of the people. To entice capital into commer-

cial operations which have not been undertaken yet and which have in them no element of risk, Government should guarantee a small profit. This has been done in the case of railways. Why should not the same action be taken with regard to other matters? In enterprises, which are as yet unexploited, and in which an element of risk is involved, Government may well act as pioneer and lead the way, raising loans for the purpose in the British markets. The policy that we are recommending will at first entail a large expenditure on the public purse, but it will be nothing like the money spent periodically on famines, and it will ultimately be repaid manifold.

In reviewing Mr. Dutt's book we have, indeed, travelled far—from an examination of the principles of Indian land policy to the general question of industrialism in the country. It was necessary to do this in order to solve the problem before us. To guard against misapprehension, we re-state our position. The principle has been recognised by our Government that, so far as lies in its power, no person shall die of starvation. It is but a short step from this to the recognition of another principle that work must be found for every person, who is willing to labour but cannot find remunerative employment. We recommend no interference with private enterprise. All that we urge is that work should be found for the millions, who in the absence of other profitable employment are cumbering the land. Private enterprise without foreign capital can do very little in this direction, and it is very difficult in the existing circumstances to induce a full flow of it. Things are bad now, and if we wait for private enterprise to remedy them, a serious crisis may arise in the not distant future. It follows from what we have stated that Government initiative and Government intervention are absolutely necessary. For the inauguration and conduct of the



policy recommended by us a statesman is required, who has a lofty conception of his duty, and who is endowed with the highest capacity for administration, with a vigour of thought and independence of judgment such as shall enable him to sweep away the cobwebs of musty tradition or well-worn platitudes. We believe we have in Lord Curzon a statesman such as this, and we look to him with confidence for the solution of this most difficult problem of the poverty of the Indian peasant.

MR. DUTT'S REPLY.

I.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "ENGLISHMAN."

SIR,—I am indebted to a kind friend in Calcutta for sending me the *Englishman* of the 12th and 17th September, containing your third and fourth articles on my book on "Famines and Land Assessment in India." I have always valued well-informed criticism; and my little book is fortunate in having its baptism of fire from your heavy artillery! And I may be permitted to add, my case will be found to be all the stronger for your able and elaborate criticism. I do not propose to carry on a controversy on the subject in your columns; indeed, the very fact that your issue of the 12th September reached me on the 8th October would show the absurdity of any attempt on my part to carry on a discussion from a distance of six thousand miles. All that I propose to do, with your permission, is to show that every statement of mine which you have questioned is based on the best authority; and I will then trust to the generosity of your readers to accept my assurance that I have not made one single statement of fact in my little book which I am not prepared to substantiate.

LAND REVENUE UNDER THE HINDU RULE.

The first point which you take up in your issue of the 12th September is the rate of land tax under the Hindu Rule. You allude to Manu's maxim to take an eighth or a sixth or a twelfth of the crops, but you add that "there is no evidence to show that this was more than a pious declaration on the part of an ancient sage." Permit me,



Sir, to point out that there is ample evidence on this point. If frequent passages in the works of Kalidasa and other writers who lived after the Christian era count for nothing, surely the statement of an observant and generally accurate traveller like Huen Tsang, who lived in India for 15 years in the seventh century after Christ, may carry some weight. And this is what he says : "The taxes on the people are light, and the personal service required of them is moderate. Each one keeps his own worldly goods in peace, and all till the ground for their subsistence. Those who cultivate the royal estates pay a sixth part of the produce as tribute." (Professor Beal's translation.) I do not say that this rule was never violated. Harsh and exacting kings and chiefs often tried to levy more ; while cultivators and zemindars and village communities often succeeded in keeping down the estimates of produce, and paying less. My object therefore was only to quote an ancient and generally recognized rule which points to the maximum proportion of produce which may be taken from the actual cultivator without ruining agriculture.

LAND REVENUE UNDER THE MOHAMEDAN RULE.

You next refer to the land tax under the Mohamedan Rule. You allude to Ala-ud-din's demand of one-half the produce ; and to Akbar's demand of one-third the produce ; and you add that Akbar "had the lands of the country roughly surveyed" to ascertain the produce. But Akbar himself does not claim to have done so in all provinces. With regard to the whole of Bengal, the Ain-i-Akbari states : "The harvests are always abundant, measurement is not insisted upon, and the revenue demands are determined by estimate of the crop. His Majesty in his goodness has confirmed this custom." (Vol. II, Col. Jarrett's translation.) If there was no measurement of

the land, how was the estimate of the produce of a vast province prepared? Merely by rough enquiry; and do any of your readers believe that by such enquiry from the zemindars and cultivators of Bengal the officers of Akbar could ascertain the real produce of that vast province, and did succeed in realising a third share?

So far with regard to Akbar's demand, now I come to Akbar's collections. It is a well-known fact that the demand was fixed in the olden days as an ideal standard; collections were made according to the state of the crops year after year. The servants of the East Indian Company often pointed this out, and contrasted the elasticity of the Indian method of collection with the rigidity of the Company's method. And Sir John Strachey after quoting some figures supposed to represent Aurangzeb's land revenue adds the significant remark: "Whether these figures represent the demand or the collections is not stated, but no doubt the former is intended." And he adds in a note: "Little confidence can, in my opinion, be placed in the particular figures which purport to represent the amount of the Moghal revenues." Is it not idle then to refer to those figures in judging the present rates of land assessment in India?

ASSESSMENT IN MADRAS.

I extricate myself, therefore, from this fruitless discussion, and come to the more practical subject of the present assessments. I have shewn in page 108 of my work that in Madras the Government [revenue assessed was from 12 to 20 per cent. of the gross produce for dry lands, and from 16 to 31 per cent. for wet lands. You remark that this original percentage "was reduced owing to the rise" in prices and that I omitted to reproduce in my work the column of figures shewing the reduced percentage, because if I had done so "no case for over-

assessments in Madras would have been made out." Will you be surprised to learn that the original percentage, which I have shewn in my book, was never "reduced" in the sense in which that word is generally used and generally understood? What took place is fully explained in the Blue Book itself, in the following passage: "Prices having advanced since some of these settlements were completed, the proportions borne by the assessment to the gross produce have diminished." In other words the Government made the assessment at rates varying from 12 to 31 per cent., as I have stated in my book; the prices of food-grains rose in years subsequent to the assessment, and the proportion of the assessment to the gross produce naturally diminished in proportion to the rise in prices. Under these circumstances I maintain that I am absolutely right in judging of the assessment at the rates at which it was made, disregarding the variations which took place in subsequent years by a change in the prices of food crops. If the revenue authorities of Madras did make an unduly severe assessment, that fact should be candidly admitted, and the authorities need not take shelter under the plea that prices have risen since the assessment, and its original harshness has since been decreased thereby! If the prices had fallen instead of rising, the original harshness of the assessment would have been deepened and the cultivators would have found no redress till the time of the next settlement. In all cases of settlement, therefore, we judge of its harshness or leniency by taking into consideration the prevailing prices at the time of settlement. Judged by this rule, the settlement in Madras, fixing the rate in some Districts at 31 per cent. of the produce, was harsh and inconsiderate, and the relief brought to the cultivators by a subsequent rise in the prices of crops does not change the character of the settlements made, or palliate the conduct of the settlement officers.

I have again and again protested against the harsh rule in Madras, making 33 per cent. of the gross produce the maximum of assessment. This is exactly the sort of rule which induces subordinate officers to work up assessments to that high figure, where possible. In Bengal Mr. A. P. Macdonnell (now Sir Anthony Macdonnell) proposed 20 per cent. of the gross produce as the maximum of rent, and his resolution is quoted in page 107 of my book, and, as a rule, zemindars do not get more than 16 per cent. of the gross produce in any district, if the district average be taken. It is unfair and unjust therefore that the Government of Madras, which is entitled to half the customary rents, according to Sir Charles Wood's Despatch of 1864, should keep alive a rule enabling subordinate officers to screw up the assessment to one-third the gross produce in lands not irrigated at Government cost. If the Government never realises at this exorbitant rate, then the existence of the rule is uncalled for and mischievous. If the Government does sometimes realise at this rate, then the sooner a more moderate maximum is fixed, the better.

ASSESSMENT IN BOMBAY.

I quoted the figure Rs. 3-13-5 as the assessment per acre for fully assessed cultivated land in Bombay. You have referred to this as an instance of "unpardonable inaccuracy" on my part, and you state that the figure should be Rs. 1-13-3. Will you be surprised to learn that the "unpardonable inaccuracy" has been committed by my critic and not by me? I have been to the India Office again, and have consulted the last Administration Report available, *viz.*, that for 1898-99, and I have verified my figure, which is quoted from the page given in my book. I have also referred to the Administration Report of the previous year, and the figure for that year is about



Rs. 3 per acre. I am not responsible for the accuracy of the Bombay Government's calculations, but I maintain that the figure I have quoted is, as it is in the Government report, and I absolutely deny that I have been guilty of any inaccuracy in the matter.

THE ANNUAL DRAIN FROM INDIA.

In your issue of the 17th September, you state : " We may admit that the actual collections of the Moghal Emperors did fall short of their demands, but they must have been approximately close to these." And you refer to a statement of Abul Fazl as "positive evidence that Akbar's demands fixed at the decennial settlements represented his actual collections." I can only repeat that I see no "positive evidence" in Abul Fazl's statement ; and that higher authorities than myself, like Sir John Strachey, rejected the Moghal figures as worthy of "little confidence." I notice, too, that in discussing this question, you have not thought fit to refer to my argument that all the revenues of the Moghals, large or moderate, flowed back to the people, and fructified their industries and agriculture ; whereas nearly one-half of the present net revenues of India flow out of the country, fructifying the trader and the capital of other lands, and impoverishing the people of India. Early in this century, Sir John Malcolm saw this difference and spoke of Mahratta rulers in these words : " If these men exact money at times in an arbitrary manner, all their expenditure, as well as all they receive is limited to their own provinces ; but, above all causes which promote prosperity is the invariable support given to the village and other native institutions, and to the employment, far beyond what our system admits, of all classes of the population." And later on, Sir George Wingate, who has been sometimes called the father of the Bombay land revenue system, saw this

difference also and said : "Taxes spent in the country from which they are raised are totally different in their effect from taxes raised in one country and spent in another. In the former case the taxes collected from the population * * are again returned to the industrial classes." In the latter case they are "an absolute loss and extinction of the whole amount withdrawn from the taxed country." Will not this difference plead with the modern rulers of India for a more moderate rate of land revenue than the Moghal or the Mahratta or the Sikh levied ? The history of the modern world does not record another instance in which nearly one-half of the net revenues of one country was taken away from that land to fructify the trade and industries and add to the wealth of another.

ASSESSMENT IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES.

In the last portion of the article in your issue of the 17th September, you give figures showing the incidence of land revenue per acre of cultivated land, in the different provinces of India. I have already, in my book, explained my reasons for considering such provincial averages useless for our practical purposes. In the first place, in spite of all care and circumspection, these figures are never accurate ; we never know the annual value of the produce of a whole district—much less of an entire province—in any single year, and our figures must to some extent be guesswork. And, in the second place—and here, I think you will agree with me,—the low average of an entire province is no relief to a particular village or a particular field which may have been over-assessed. You show that the incidence of land revenue in the Central Provinces is lower than elsewhere in India ;—is that fact any relief to a particular district, the revenues of which have been raised a hundred per cent. suddenly at the



last settlement?—or to a village called upon to pay a third or more of the produce of its barren lands to the malguzar? You will agree with me that what we want is a protection which will extend to all individual cases,—a maximum proportion of the average produce which should not be exceeded in any single village or in any single holding. The most practical administrator in India, Sir A. P. Macdonnell, proposed such a maximum for each particular holding in Bengal in 1883; and if it was not adopted in the Tenancy Act of 1885, it is because zemindars do not generally exceed that maximum and in the eastern districts of Bengal get much less. It must surely be the object of the Government to afford the same protection to the cultivators in Central India, in Bombay and in Madras, which was proposed for Bengal and which is virtually enjoyed in Bengal.

I write this not in a spirit of criticism but simply in the hope and belief that the Government of India, which earnestly desires and endeavours to promote the prosperity of the agricultural classes, will see the necessity of framing some rules which will afford protection against over-assessment in every individual case, and will thus inspire the poorest and the most helpless classes of the agricultural people in India with a sense of security, a knowledge of the limit of their liabilities, which does not now exist. If many of the complaints now made in Bombay and in Madras are exaggerated or unfounded, such a simple and definite limit of assessment will make such complaints impossible in the future. If some of those complaints are well-founded, the definite limit of assessment will correct the mistakes made. And if the provincial average in every part of India is already low, as you state, then such a definite limit of assessment will not affect the land revenue at all. In the cause of good Government, and for the protection of the poorest and humblest of my



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MR. DUTT AND LAND ASSESSMENTS.

agricultural countrymen, I appeal to the Government, to fix some equitable limit,—such as Sir A. P. Macdonnell proposed for Bengal,—which will give security and protection,—not to provinces generally—but in the case of each individual village and each individual cultivator.—
I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

ROMESH C. DUTT.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,
London, 12th Oct.



REPLY TO MR. DUTT'S LETTER.

To those of our readers who have carefully studied our articles on Mr. Dutt and Land Assessments, it must be quite clear that the letter published in another column is not a very convincing reply. We do not propose to go over the whole ground again, but we cannot permit Mr. Dutt's criticisms to pass unchallenged. We have nowhere questioned the fact that the old Hindu Rajas took a sixth part of the gross produce of land as tribute. What we said was that there was no evidence that the still more moderate assessment suggested by Manu was more than a pious declaration on his part. Since Mr. Dutt questions our statement that before settlement Akbar had the lands of the country roughly surveyed, we quote the following from Baden-Powell: "In 1571 A.D. the survey was commenced: a standard, the *ilahi gaz*, or yard rod, was fixed and a *taneb* or chain. The settlement extended to Bengal in 1782." Mr. Dutt sees no positive evidence in Abul Fazl's statement about Akbar's collections. Here is chapter and verse for Mr. Dutt: "For the above purpose having formed an aggregate of the rates of collection from the commencement of the fifteenth year of the reign to the twenty-fourth, inclusive, they took a tenth part of that total as the annual rate for ten years to come." In writing about the Madras assessments, Mr. Dutt has again failed to note that the revenue rate is consolidated with the irrigation rate in the case of wet lands. If he will add the revenue rate per acre prevailing in the N.-W. P. to the water rate, he will find that the combined rate is much higher than the consolidated rate in Madras. The revenue rate on dry lands in Madras is about one rupee

per acre, a fact which Mr. Dutt will discover for himself if he will refer to the last Administration Report for that Presidency.

As for Mr. Dutt's explanation of his omission to reproduce the figures from one column while he cited those from the next, we leave it to our readers to judge whether it is not mere logomachy. Again every settlement officer will ridicule the principle he lays down in connection with prices. About the assessments in the Central Provinces Mr. Dutt's attitude is somewhat curious. We proved conclusively that the Province as a whole was not over-assessed, and that its revenue rates compared very favourably with those of other provinces. Mr. Dutt, thereupon, shifts his ground and asks whether that is any relief to a particular district whose revenues have been suddenly raised a hundred per cent. If the original assessments were very low, as in the case of the Nagpur and Bilaspur settlements, why should they not be raised on the termination of these settlements, provided that the new demands are much more favourable than in the most favoured provinces, *viz.*, Bengal and Northern India? One word more, and we have done. We pointed out that Mr. Dutt gave, with unpardonable inaccuracy, Rs. 3-13-5 as the revenue rate for Bombay, and we proved that the correct figure was Rs. 1-13-3. Mr. Dutt is good enough to set us right, and he informs us that he has consulted the last Administration Report in the India Office. Will he kindly re-visit the India Office and again consult the Report? If he will look at page 81 of App. IV A (5) last column, last figure, he will find the rate for Bombay Presidency Proper as we have stated it. The figure that he has given from page 75 is only for the Northern Division of Bombay and not for the whole Presidency. Here again Mr. Dutt commits the mistake of confounding a part with the whole.

MR. DUTT'S REPLY.

II.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "ENGLISHMAN."

SIR,—A friend of mine has placed in my hands two numbers of the *Englishman* containing your fifth and sixth articles on my book on Land Assessments in India. I do not propose to write a long reply again after my previous letter; but I am sure you will permit me to point out in a few words where you have misapprehended me, and where your conclusions are, in my opinion, unsound.

(1) You quote my words that "the wisest, safest, and most considerate policy is to let landlords make their own arrangements with cultivators." And you infer from this that I object to placing any restrictions on the acts of landlords. Here you are wrong. If you had cared to turn to the Tenancy Bill discussions of Bengal, published in the *Calcutta Gazette* in 1883 and 1884, you would have found that I was among the strongest advocates for placing such restraints on enhancements as to make the position of cultivators absolutely secure. Many of my proposals were accepted by the then Revenue Secretary, Mr. A. P. Macdonnell (now Sir A. P. Macdonnell), and urged by him in the Viceregal Council with that practical sympathy for the Indian cultivator which has always marked his distinguished career. And, again, if you had referred to pages 72 and 78 of my book on "Famines in India," you would have seen that I have not changed my views within these sixteen years, and that I hope to die as I have always lived, an advocate of moderate rents, be they payable to the State or to landlords. I sincerely

hope that in the Revenue Bill which Sir A. P. Macdonnell has now in hand, the cultivator of the North-West Provinces will be completely safeguarded against undue enhancements by the landlord.

Such safeguards being provided, I contend that the zemindars should be allowed "to make their own arrangements with cultivators." When the zemindar does wrong there is an appeal to the Revenue or Civil officer. When the Government officer does wrong, even by mistake, the Government allows no appeal to a Civil Court, and hence the wrong is unredressed. And if you cite the authority of Mr. Crooke in favour of letting the Government fix the rental, I can cite the higher authority of Sir A. P. Macdonnell, who in his evidence before the Currency Committee spoke with satisfaction on the system prevailing in the North-West Provinces of the zemindars making their arrangements with cultivators.

(2) You produce facts to prove that the average rent in the Central Provinces is Re. 1-0-3 per acre of cropped area, and that it is Rs. 2-12-11 per acre in Bengal, and you ask, "Will anybody have the courage to say" that the rental in the Central Provinces is not lenient? Surely it does not require any courage to make such a statement after comparing the abundant produce of Bengal with the poor average produce of the Central Provinces, where so much of the cropped area is poor soil, and is only nominally assessed.

But, as I have stated in my last letter, these provincial averages do not meet the real difficulty, and do not give redress to the particular cases where the hardship is most severely felt. I have proved that the rental in Bengal is not more than 20 per cent. of the produce, according to Sir William Hunter's figures, which are 25 years old; at the present day the proportion is not over one-sixth of the produce. You say that the rental, compared to



the produce, is not higher in the Central Provinces. If that be so, why not lay down the general principle fixing the maximum rent at one-fifth the average produce, which will bring redress to every particular case? If the present rental is not higher, then such a rule will not effect either the malguzar's rental or the Government revenue. And if the present rental is higher, then the rule is all the more urgently demanded for the protection of the cultivator.

(3) You then come to the case of Bilaspur District. You say that the rents in 1868 stood at a little over three lakhs of rupees, and had been increased by malguzars to about six lakhs of rupees by 1888. This precisely points to the necessity on which I have insisted, again and again, during the last sixteen years, of providing adequate security against enhancements and extending adequate protection to every single cultivator. It proves the necessity, not of the Government fixing the rents, but of enabling the cultivators to defend themselves against undue enhancements made by landlords, as the cultivators of Bengal have been enabled to do by successive Rent Acts. Let us treat the cultivators, not as children requiring eternal nursing from settlement officers, but as responsible men with clear rights which they know how to defend, and they will be all the better for such treatment,—all the stronger against the exactions of malguzars and the attacks of famine.

(4) You point out that the average rent rates in the Central Provinces in 1868 were As. 9-3, As. 9-4, and As. 8-4 per acre, and that they were raised to As. 9-10 and As. 9-7 after 1888. I am loth to reply on these provincial averages for reasons already stated, but let us accept these figures—what do they prove? It is well known to all settlement officers that the best lands in a province are first brought under cultivation,



and that with the further extension of cultivation, less fertile lands are reclaimed. In 1868, *i.e.*, after fifty years of peace in the Central Provinces, and after twelve years of British rule in those Provinces, practically all the best lands were under cultivation, and the rental was fixed at As. 9-4 to As. 8-4. Worse lands were added to the area of cultivation during the succeeding twenty years, and instead of the average being decreased it was raised !

(5) Lastly you allude to Sir John Woodburn's report that no trouble or difficulty was experienced in collecting the enhanced demand for three years. You rightly describe Sir John Woodburn as the most humane of Provincial Governors ; and I do not yield to you, or to any man in India, in the high esteem I bear for Sir John's lofty qualifications as an administrator, or in the sincere regard, and something more than regard, that I feel for his personal kindness and humanity. But when you allude to the absence of trouble or difficulty during three years as a proof of mild assessment, do you not overlook the unalterable loyalty and submission of my countrymen to every act of Government as to every calamity that Nature can inflict ? In the present year of famine, hundreds of thousands have perished in Western India without one act of disorder or disturbance ; a scarcity one-tenth in severity in any other country in the world would have been attended by riots and robbery, pillage and murder. If you take this loyal submission to the acts of the Government as a sign of prosperity and contentment, you teach the nation to adopt other and less desirable methods to manifest their grievances. On the occasion of the arrival of a new Chief Commissioner in Bilaspur in 1891 or 1892, 15,000 people collected from all parts of the district in the height of the rainy season to make their protest against the new assessments. All the



way from the station to the city, a distance of over three miles, was one continuous gathering of the people, crying to the rulers *Bandobast se mar gaya*, "the settlement has killed us." The cry was uttered in vain, and the people submitted to the inevitable, till the first years of drought revealed to the world the blunder which had been committed. Petition to our rulers against hardship and oppression is the only method we yet know; and your remarks seem to teach us that this method of appealing to the justice of our administrators fails of its purpose; and that we have suffered by our loyalty to the powers that be! Educated India still has faith in this old method; the most distinguished leaders of the nation are the most moderate in their action and advice, and repress to the very utmost in their power every suggestion of swerving from the path of loyalty. But all this is misunderstood! Their efforts to repress indiscreet acts on the part of any section of their countrymen are unrecognised; their advice and co-operation are carefully and rigorously excluded from the executive council of the Empire; and their endeavours to express their views in a strictly constitutional manner, and in the most sober and moderate form, is often set down as sedition! All this fills me with pain because the greatest desire of my life has been to see the British rule in India as popular, as it is undoubtedly just in its intentions. Moderate and loyal and representative Indians, if taken into confidence in executive work, can serve this purpose and fulfil this mission; their exclusion is no gain to the strength of the Empire. To take a concrete example, why should not the revenue-settlement work in the Central Provinces be under the control of a Council consisting of the settlement officer, and two such loyal and representative men as the Honourable Mr. Bose and Mr. Chitnavis? Their presence in the Council would probably help the Chief Commissioner to know the views



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and condition of the people better, and to avoid some mistakes ; in any case it would make the administration more popular, and keep the rulers more in touch with the people. Why should not the Lieutenant-Governors of Bengal and of Northern India be assisted in their arduous work by executive councils, including some moderate and well-informed and representative Indians, and why should not the Governors of Bombay and Madras, welcome such loyal co-operation in their executive councils? I have often asked myself why the British Government in India does not adopt this means, ready to hand, to make its administration not only more well-informed, but also more popular as well as stronger?

I have often questioned myself why the rulers of India, who are just and considerate men, do not adopt this measure, not only to make the administration more just, but also to convince all classes of people (and this is of importance in India) that justice is intended, and is done, in every detail of administration. I can honestly state that I have yet found no reply to these enquiries. The present exclusive system not only leads to frequent blunders, specially in revenue administration, but necessarily makes the British rule less popular in India than it need be.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

ROMESH C. DUTT.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,
London, 26th Oct. 1900.



LAST WORDS.

I HAVE been asked to republish in a handy form the series of articles on "Mr. Dutt and Land Assessments," which were originally printed in the *Calcutta Englishman*. I am much indebted to the proprietors of that newspaper for permission to re-issue the articles in the present form. Before this little venture could be submitted to the verdict of the public, it became necessary to say a few final words in connection with the two letters which Mr. Dutt has sent in reply to my examination of his book. I do not propose to weary my readers with an exhaustive rejoinder to his criticisms, since I should have to go over the ground previously covered. Mr. Dutt's argumentative methods are somewhat peculiar. He takes a bit here and a bit there from my articles and then proceeds to criticise the same, while he ignores the context. For instance, in writing about the Madras assessments, he makes no mention of the consolidation of the water rate on irrigated lands with the revenue rate, to which I drew his attention. Again, in writing about the enhancement of the rent rates of the Bilaspur District, he entirely overlooks the fact that between the settlement of 1868 and that of 1888 prices had been doubled and in some cases trebled, and that in view of this rise the enhancements at the later settlement were trifling. The truth is that Mr. Dutt never knows when he is beaten. You may point out the inaccuracy of his facts and the unsoundness of his conclusions : he comes up smiling again, he clothes his old

arguments in new language and he raises fresh and sometimes irrelevant issues. All this may be admirable as a matter of dialectics. Since, however, the object of the present discussion is not mere logomachy but the attainment of truth, I shall confine myself to the original issues.

As stated in the first article, the thesis of Mr. Dutt's book on "Famines in India" is "that the intensity and the frequency of recent famines are greatly due to the resourceless condition and the chronic poverty of the cultivators, caused by the over-assessment of the soil, on which they depend for a living." On this very serious indictment of the land policy of the Government of India I joined direct issue with Mr. Dutt. Facts and figures were laid before the public to show that his allegations about excessive revenue and rent assessments were far from the truth. Detailed evidence was given to prove that the assessments of the present day were moderate in themselves, and that the land policy of our Government was much more liberal than the policy of any previous Government of the country. Mr. Dutt has not seriously challenged any of the facts converging directly to the establishment of these conclusions, nor has he questioned the accuracy of more than one figure. With regard to this one figure it has been shown how Mr. Dutt has gone wrong. If my facts and figures are correct, the conclusions drawn from them must inevitably follow. Mr. Dutt has selected three provinces for his fulminations: (1) the Central Provinces, (2) Bombay, (3) Madras. It has been shown by figures, the accuracy of which it is impossible to impeach, that the revenue rates of the first two provinces compare very favourably with those of the other provinces, that the Madras rate is not high in itself and that, including as it does a rate for irrigation—a payment for a special service rendered by Government,—it is very moderate. I



may add that the average rate for dry or unirrigated lands is about one rupee per acre, and that when the water-supply on irrigated lands runs short or when they are periodically kept fallow, liberal remissions of the assessments are made. Mr. Dutt says that these provincial averages do not meet the real difficulty and do not give redress to the particular cases, where the hardship is most severely felt. Now either our author does not accept the accuracy of these provincial figures or he does. If he does not, why does he not show where they are inaccurate? If he accepts them as correct, what becomes of his sweeping assertion that the intensity and the frequency of recent famines are due to the impoverished condition of the cultivators to which they are reduced by over-assessments. Nobody in his senses ever affirmed that in every district and in every village of India revenue assessments were moderate; and I distinctly stated in my sixth article, that, without an exhaustive examination, it was not possible to say that in no district were the assessments high. Moreover, I drew attention to those of the Northern Districts of Bombay, which required an explanation. But this is different from the indictment of the general policy of Government, different from the suggestion that the impoverishment of the Central Provinces, for instance, is due "to the exhausting rental fixed in these provinces." Readers of Mr. Dutt's book have risen from the perusal of it with the haunting idea that whole provinces have been desolated by over-assessments of the soil, and the words that I have quoted in the first part of this paper can have no meaning other than this. If Mr. Dutt surrenders his original position, if he admits that on the whole the assessments of the present day are moderate, while holding that here and there, in a district or in a village they are excessive, let him say so distinctly. Let him



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then produce evidence regarding the particular district or village or field that, in his opinion, is over-assessed. He will thus render good service both to the actual sufferers and to Government. If, on the other hand, he adheres to the original thesis of his book, let him grapple with and controvert my facts.

I. C. S.



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